Between Curriculum Documents and Pedagogical Practice: A Review of Music Education in Indonesia

Piter Sembiring a *, Yudi Sukmayadi b, Sandie Gunara c, Uus Karwati d

a,b,c,d Art Education, Postgraduate School, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the construction of pedagogy in Indonesian music education through the relationship of curriculum documents and teaching practice. More specifically, this study aims to understand the interpretation, implementation, and adjustment of music education curricula in the formal, non-formal, and informal learning contexts. Using an interpretative literature review method, this study reviews and synthesizes selected literature, mainly published between the years 2020 and 2025, related to curriculum and pedagogy, teaching practice, and the cultural aspects of music education in Indonesia. The study demonstrates the ongoing disjunction between the curriculum as policy and music education pedagogy as practice. Although the curriculum documents can be policy, structure, and level documents, in the practice of teaching music, a major part is determined by the teacher, the context, and the cultural activity. Participants in the study described the important role of non-formal education, extra-curricular activities, and cultural activities in implementing the curriculum, which is often beyond the guidelines of the curriculum document. The study suggests that the explicit description of the curriculum is not enough in teaching music. More is needed from a curriculum that demonstrates an understanding of the pedagogy involved, the variety of contexts, and the relationship of policy and practice.

Keywords: Curriculum enactment; documents of policy; music education; teaching practice.

1. Introduction

Across the world, music education has been recognized as an area of study that integrates artistic fields, various forms of teaching, and sociocultural components within a formal school setting. Different education systems use curriculum frameworks that manage learning goals, the organization of content, principles of assessment, and offer flexibility in the interpretation of teaching. In music education, this connection between curriculum construction and teaching practices is especially intricate, because musical

* Piter Sembiring. ORCID ID.: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8633-5293
  E-mail address: piter.sembiring@upi.edu

learning encompasses various dimensions as cognitive, performative, and contextual musical experiences that go beyond the written policies of any document (Cherniak et al., 2020; J. Guo & Chiu, 2024; Savage, 2021).

Scholars of curriculum studies differentiate between curriculum as an official document and curriculum as practiced. Policy documents outline an intended course of education. However, they remain abstract until a teacher translates, prioritizes, and adapts each piece of a given curriculum in a classroom (Chimbi & Jita, 2021; Quigley & MacDonald, 2024). Research on curriculum implementation focuses on the relationship between an enacted curriculum and the teaching practices that result from the intersection of pedagogical content knowledge, the constituents of the particular school, and the culture of the community. This results in different teaching practices under the same curriculum (Chyntia wongso et al., 2024; D'Angelo, 2021). In music education, this process of curriculum implementation is shaped by teachers' musical training, availability of musical instruments, and the prevailing musical culture of the community, all of which influence how curriculum aims are converted to teaching practices (Ho & Law, 2020; Lianga et al., 2024; Vaughn et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, music education is integrated into the national education system, and as such, it has gone through several cycles of changes in accordance with changes within the education system (Aryandari, 2023; Hikmawati & Hosnan, 2022; Sularso et al., 2023). Frameworks of the national curriculum outline desired outcomes for students in relation to distinctively Indonesian nation-building goals, as well as goals for the appreciation of other cultures - through the lenses of music, aesthetics, and creativity. Such frameworks serve as the formal basis for the planning and evaluation of teaching and learning across different settings. Indonesia is a nation of diverse and unevenly distributed educational and cultural resources, which includes teaching staff, teaching materials, and regional cultures, and all this diversity impacts the interpretation and practice of music teaching and learning in the schools (Hidayatullah, 2023; Julia et al., 2020).

Most Indonesian scholars focus on music education's curriculum issues by studying teaching models, learning media, cultural integration, and policy practice. Curriculum directives are often studied in a limited way by exploring their classroom application, or by examining the ways in which teachers customize curriculum content to fit the local context. Each of these studies expands the literature on music teaching, yet there is a tendency to separate discourse on document curricula from enactment. Thus, there is little connection regarding frameworks and practices or the Indonesian discourse on curriculum in music education literature (Nasution & Indrasari, 2024).

Research in music education outside of Indonesia has placed more focus on curriculum enactment as a non-linear, negotiated process (Y. Guo & Karin, 2024; Haning, 2021). Because teachers are seen as interpretive leaders, authors focus on the professional, institutional, and contextual dimensions of the frameworks and consider curriculum a

dynamic entity that interrelates policy and pedagogy in practice. This helps to shift the focus from the expectation that a curriculum is a cohesive document to examining the collective understanding of the curriculum in practice in educational research (Cherbow et al., 2025; Hodge & Stosich, 2022; Niemelä, 2021).

Recent literature-based reviews in music education illustrate the importance of synthesizing research reviews related to the curriculum to understand the common themes, conceptual tensions, and interpretative patterns across studies. These reviews reveal that differences between the curriculum and actual practices in the classroom are indicative of critical concerns regarding the central frameworks of music education, the positioning of teachers as curriculum interpreters, and the place of musical knowledge in education. These studies showcase the need for synthesizing reviews that study curriculum and pedagogy as separate, yet interrelated, scholarly domains (Adhikari, 2025; Uygur, 2025).

This is the context in which the current review looks at music education in Indonesia through a focused synthesis of literature that combines both curriculum documents and pedagogy. This article seeks to integrate studies that have analyzed Indonesian music education curricula and certain pedagogy documents separately. Integrating studies of curricula and pedagogy policy enables the review to provide a systematic portrayal of the Indonesian music education curricula through different conceptual lenses and teaching practices, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of curriculum studies and music education research in Indonesia.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study has implemented a qualitative literature-based research design. The review is an interpretative and thematic review of literature, focusing on assembling and critiquing scholarly arguments, concept discussions, and analyses of policy literature. Instead of taking on a systematic review approach, this study used an interpretative literature-based approach centered on thematic synthesis of a selection of literature. This type of review is unique and differentiated from systematic mapping and aggregative review designs due to a predominant interpretative and conceptual approach to the existing scholarship (Mckenzie et al., 2021; Nowacki, 2021). The purpose of this literature review was to convey and interpret the conceptualizations and discussions within the academic discourse surrounding the music education curriculum in Indonesia, including discussions on pedagogical practice. It was important to understand, and, interpret curriculum, not just as a document of policy, but as a construct of pedagogy that is formed and shaped through scholarship and educational practice.

2.2. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected from academic literature pertaining to music education curriculum in Indonesia. These included peer-reviewed journals, national curriculum materials, books, and select conference proceedings pertaining to curriculum and music education. The literature reviewed in this study primarily reflects scholarship published between 2020 to 2025, corresponding to recent curriculum developments and pedagogical shifts in music education. Relevant publications were obtained from Google Scholar, Scopus, and national journal portal databases.

The literature selection process focused on sources that specifically described curriculum frameworks and their execution, teaching practice, and/or theory of practice in curriculum implementation in music education. Publications that focused solely on the teaching of technical skills and/or performances without reference to curriculum were excluded. The selection process gives preference to those of substantive relevance to the research question. It is the literature's engagement with the curriculum and pedagogy of music education that formed the basis for literature selection rather than the volume of literature or bibliometric counts.

2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The selected literature was examined using qualitative thematic analysis. The literature was read multiple times in order to identify the concepts, arguments, and patterns that were the same or similar in regard to curriculum documents and pedagogy. The first coding was descriptive, focusing on the design of the curriculum, or the curriculum as policy and the role of the teacher as implementer. These descriptive codes were clustered into higher order codes that encompassed the central themes in literature. The analysis focused more on interpretative synthesis rather than statistical synthesis. The data were analyzed by means of iterative and comparative reading to capture recurring ideas, patterns of reasoning, and convergences of themes and arguments in the literature. This analysis results in forming coherent thematic clusters or categories that were reflective of the data's repeated interpretative patterns, in line with the accepted practice of qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Lochmiller, 2021; Sun et al., 2025).

2.4. Data Trustworthiness and Measurement

The first strategy that was put in place to improve the trustworthiness of the findings is documented. First, source triangulation is the first strategy where different strands of literature were applied (e.g., policies, empirical literature, and conceptual analysis), enabling the cross-validation of the interpretations of the divergent forms of scholarly literature.

Second, analytic consistency is the second strategy where the literature is coded and the themes systematically developed to ensure the interpretations are founded on patterns that emerged in the literature and not on individual statements. Finally, the interpretative role of the researcher in the synthesis of the curriculum discourse was guided by the curriculum and music education studies theory, while the synthesis of the curriculum discourse was guided by the theory of the curriculum and music education studies.

The analysis does not depend on statistical indicators but justifiably derives credibility from analytical coherence, transparency of the process, and the interpretative framework's source consistency. This confidence is further strengthened from the consistency of analytical decision-making and review literature thrust articulation throughout the literature review. These principles adhere to the interpretative research criteria and allow for the credibility of the findings to be assessed (Johnson et al., 2020).

3. Results

This analysis includes the findings from the reviewed literature and applies them to the potential contribution to the curriculum and pedagogy of music education in Indonesia. This analysis includes the literature and organizes it thematically to show the interaction of curriculum structures and pedagogic frameworks, policy frameworks, and institutional frameworks with teaching and learning across formal, non-formal, and informal music education. This section incorporates empirical literature and constructive commentary to provide a more comprehensive account of the enactment of music education in practice. Thus, the literature shows how educators implement and adapt curriculum frameworks, attend to the needs of the students, and respond to the contextual challenges to construct music education. These interconnected dimensions of the literature provide a comprehensive account of the interaction of curriculum frameworks and pedagogic frameworks in the music education of Indonesia.

3.1. Curriculum Orientation and Policy Frameworks in Music Education

In Indonesia, the general literature shows that the music education curriculum is mostly considered policy papers that particularize the teaching goals, the organization of content, and the procedures for evaluation. Various studies observe that curriculum documents serve, for the most part, a bureaucratic, administrative role rather than a pedagogical one that helps music educators guide their teaching. Consequently, teachers end up paying more attention to compliance with formal indicators and other bureaucratic requirements, which leads to a loss of depth in pedagogy and the processes of learning music. Such an approach almost always ignores the curricular need for process-oriented and experiential musical learning that depends on exploration, imagination, and participation (Ilma Zidni, Khanifah, 2025).

When studying the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in music education, policy reforms point to autonomy, flexibility and student-centered pedagogies being the focus of the changes. However, at the secondary education level, teacher musical competence, lack of teaching aids, and poor institutional preparedness are all barriers to effective curriculum enactment. It is these interconnected issues that affect the realization of curriculum goals in music education where outcomes cannot be achieved solely through compliance with official curriculum documents (Hulumudi, 2024).

Alfan Fazz & Sukmayadi (2025) describe how teachers of creative subjects, such as music, experience a lack of clear direction as overlapping transitional curricula result in fragmented policies and practices. During such curricular transitions, teachers must respond to multiple, overlapping, and often contradictory policy documents. Consequently, teachers experience a lack of clarity in their own directions, resulting in disjointed practices and resultant uncertain learning for students. It is suggested that such challenges as these, during curriculum reform, in music education, go well beyond revisions of policy documents and continue to exist until a thorough negotiation of pedagogy is achieved in a given classroom context.

Embedded in primary education, curriculum innovation in music education is still in its infancy. Initiatives that foster participation, along with active and creative musical play, are often the result of individual motivated teachers. As a result, the varying degrees of institutional support mean that all too often, the related and collateral practices of music education are of poor quality and that in addition, the scope of practice is so very limited. At the heart of such a phenomenon is the agency of the teacher in the practice of curriculum, the realization that curriculum is a lived experience and practice, contextualized, rather than one bound in prescriptive text. The phenomenon of self-directed learning in the informal and independent music learning of students, in the experience of research, contributes to the realization of learner agency (Purbawati et al., 2024; Sukmayadi et al., 2022).

3.2. Pedagogical Strategies and Media Utilization

The studies indicate that there is an expanding range of teaching methods being utilized in music education in Indonesia. In terms of teaching a band, there is research that examines the use of several methods to deal with the complexities of the ensemble and the differences in student achievement. With these methods, teachers are able to deal with the curricular requirements and the creative collaborative music making, and in this case, teaching is seen as a form of curriculum mediation and as a form of musical engagement (Sembiring, Sukmayadi, et al., 2025).

The research shows that instructional media are important for music teaching and learning. The research on learning materials for music that is audio-based shows that these auditory materials aid listening, imitative and creative integrative music

processing. The method of teaching and the audio media that are used have to be aligned for the audio media to be used in a pedagogically constructive manner. If there is no clear pedagogical purpose, the use of media is only seen to be an extra element to the learning (Hutapea et al., 2025).

The potential to utilize guided and autonomous practice has been supported by the use of digital media in most areas of teaching singing (vocal pedagogy). Digital resources assist learning in most areas, but their learning potential is based upon the use of effective teaching strategies, which in this case, foster reflection and encourage sustained, active involvement. In instrumental teaching (or learning), some strategies combining the use of visuals and the teaching of music literacy have been proven to enhance learners' technical skills and their musical understanding, although this 'dual outcome' is not guaranteed' and learner engagement may quite easily (and perhaps, even predictably) be compromised (Sembiring, 2025; Suryati & Widodo, 2021).

The use of digital technology in early childhood music education is evidenced in the literature. There are interactive digital apps to assist children visually and aurally in the development of their understanding of rhythm and musical notation. In the literature on teacher education, the researchers Ananda et al (2024) and Cipta et al (2024)exemplify the use of a harmonized framework of technology, pedagogy, and content (TPACK) to achieve a high quality of music teaching. In teaching music, the effective use of technology is most often a result of the harmonization of the three TPACK components.

3.3. Activity-Based Music Learning Practices

The importance of activity-based learning in music education is well recognized. Research on school band programs demonstrates that these settings provide learning opportunities outside the traditional classroom, and allow students to learn and practice all areas of music: the technical, the expressive, and the collaborative. Such practices point to the importance of learning through experience, especially in music education (Sembiring et al., 2024).

In the context of private music education, the dominant approach is goal-oriented, with an emphasis on pre-determined and structured learning sequences and outcomes. Research has shown that these learning goals, when accompanied by some form of assessment, are both motivating and manageable, resulting in positive outcomes in the area of musical development (Sembiring & Maulana, 2025). The study of achievement motivation and goal setting reveals that the combination of structured tasks, individualized pathways, and responsive teaching feedback fosters the development of both mastery and performance goal orientations. This combination also encourages sustained practice and prolonged engagement. In particular, responsive and adaptive teaching helps music students understand and embrace the developmental nature of

music education, particularly in individualized learning settings (Sembiring, Maulana, et al., 2025; Sembiring & Puri, 2025).

Teaching a whole class as a rhythm-based ensemble has demonstrated the value of embodied musical engagement as a pedagogy. Studying the learning of rhythm sections shows that students gain a greater comprehension of musical structures, coordination, and ensemble awareness through the activity. In middle childhood education and through the use of music-based interventions, activities of a structured musical form improve focus and attention, thereby, reinforcing the pedagogy of music that is more than artistic (Herdiyana & Respati, 2023; Ismaniar et al., 2025).

3.4. Cultural, Traditional, and Technological Integration

Music education in Indonesia is often described as part of the cultural and community traditions. Informal educational environments exist in community-based participatory traditions, where social and cultural knowledge is carried through direct involvement and cultural interaction. Some studies focusing on cultural sustainability refer to community-based participatory traditions of music education as a holistic, interrelated system (F. S. haan S. Sinaga et al., 2025; F. S. S. Sinaga & Sinaga, 2021).

Within and across formal and informal educational contexts, educational ethnomusicology emphasizes the provision of traditional music for cultural transmission and the construction of identity. Such perspectives position traditional music as curricular content and as an ethnocultural asset for the community. Research on the use of technology demonstrates that digital tools, when applied with educational objectives, can foster cultural sustainability and bring flexibility to the music education curriculum (Saputra et al., 2024; Supriatna, Sukmayadi, & Purwanto, 2025).

Comparative studies across cultures highlight the difficulties of teaching local music with Western notations, which suggests a need for more culturally responsive teaching. Repertoire-based studies highlight the teaching materials incorporating local music as a means of achieving culturally situated music education. The critical examination of the reform of music education suggests the intricacies and challenges of change within the curriculum of the arts, especially the issues of standardization and the need for pedagogical freedom (Munaf et al., 2025; Supiarza & Tjahjodiningrat, 2021; Supriatna, Sukmayadi, & Gunawan, 2025; Wadiyo et al., 2024).

4. Discussion

The study shows that music education in Indonesia experiences an ongoing imbalance between the curricular documents as policy texts and pedagogical practice as lived educational experience. While the curriculum documents provided the structural and regulative bounds for the framing of music education, the enactment of the documents in

music education depends on teachers' perceptions, the organizational context, and the social and cultural surroundings. This explains the gap between the intentions of the policy and the curricular implementation in music education and the focus on context responsive implementation rather than direct policy mediation, which is a curricular phenomenon recognized by scholars in curriculum studies as the gap between the curriculum as a document and the curriculum in practice (Browne, 2022; Guadalupe et al., 2023; Jääskeläinen et al., 2023).

The structure of music education also adds a layer of complexity to the issues of curriculum. Education that incorporates music draws on bodily movement, and creative, and social collaboration, which are components that are likely to fall outside the bounds of a standardized curriculum. Because of these educational constraints, teachers become active agents of the curriculum by making pedagogic decisions, creative methods, and incorporating activities that are outside the bounds of a curriculum to define what the curriculum is. This description is consistent with studies that identify teachers as primary participants in the implementation of the curriculum and not as policy implementers (Kuchynka et al., 2022; Lumadi, 2020).

The results also show that in Indonesia, music learning often takes place in various contexts aside from formal schooling, such as in extracurricular activities, private lessons, and community practices. These contexts allow for increased flexibility, and learner-centered approaches, especially through informal curriculum improvisation, where curriculum creation is more about responsive practices than compliance to a policy. Imaginatively, curriculum is about the lived pedagogical practices and the interactions that happen daily in the classroom, as opposed to the texts, documents, and policies that are drawn up formally (Gkonou & Miller, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022).

Moreover, the music practices of some cultures and communities frame music education as cultural participation, rather than as just the transmission of a skill. From a sociocultural lens, music learning is the engagement in activities of a culture that are significant for the formation, sustenance, and sustenance of a culture, and the connectedness of the learners to a community (Goopy, 2022; Martínez-Rodríguez et al., 2022). To some extent, the increased use of digital technologies represents a shift in music education, and the challenges and risks that accompany it. The integration of technologies in education needs to be pedagogically driven to support the intended educational outcomes, and not just be a techno fix. This is a concern that is prevalent in the research on music education today (Habe & Biasutti, 2023; Kim, 2023).

The discussions present a compelling reason for rethinking the curricula of music education as a conceptual structure that can embrace pedagogical flexibility, contextual diversity, and the empowerment of the teacher. Defining the intersection of the curriculum policy and the practices of teaching and learning music necessitates a long-term commitment to the professional growth of the teachers and an increased

acknowledgement of the culturally, technologically, and practically oriented facets of curriculum design. The proposed frameworks for the improvement of music education in Indonesia are pedagogically valid, contextually pertinent, and sustainable.

5. Conclusions

The study finds that music education in Indonesia reflects a continued and lasting tension between curriculum documents as policy texts and pedagogical practice as lived educational experience. While curriculum documents provide a formal guide and a policy regulative vertically structured framework, they do not facilitate music education enactment as far as teachers' mediating, school, and culture and context structures are concerned. The practices develop through negotiation, adjustment and 'innovativeness' especially in active learning, informal education, and ethnomusicology education, which are not always fully recognized in the standardization of the curriculum. The further incorporation of digital and new pedagogical models signifies a further complexity in the enactment of curricula. The patterns reflect the complexity of designing music curricula. These observations illustrate that music curricula do not prescribe the stylized design of music curricula and that they also attend to the agency of teachers and the environment. The study concludes that there is a need to design music curricula that provide a greater emphasis on flexibility and practice. There also needs to be a long-term focus on the professional development of music teachers to help them develop their capacity to interpret curricula and enact the policy in pedagogically sound ways. These measures are necessary to achieve a greater alignment of curriculum policy with the teaching and learning of music in Indonesia in a more sustainable and contextually appropriate way.

Acknowledgements

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